

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL DURBAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2165

INFO AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

UNCLAS DURBAN 0155

CAPE TOWN ALSO FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, SF

SUBJ: PROGRESSIVE REFORM PARTY WINS DURBAN NORTH ELECTION

1. THE PROGRESSIVE REFORM PARTY (PRP) CONTINUED ITS RECENT WINNING STREAK BY CAPTURING A PLURALITY OF 4,243 VOTES IN THE DURBAN NORTH PARLIAMENTARY BY-ELECTION. THE PRP CANDIDATE, PIETERMARITZBURG ADVOCATE HARRY PITMAN, DEFEATED HIS NEAREST RIVAL , UNITED PARTY (UP) CANDIDATE RON REYNOLDS, BY 324 VOTES. SENATOR DENIS WORRALL, REPRESENTING THE NATIONAL PARTY, POLLED A RESPECTABLE 3,139 VOTES WHILE INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE MARTIN LOUW, RUNNING ON A "SUPPORT RHODESIA" PLATFORM, RECEIVED ONLY 95 VOTES AND LOST HIS DEPOSIT. A HIGH SEVENTY-SIX PER CENT OF THE ELIGIBLE VOTERS WENT TO THE POLLS.

2. THE DEFEAT OF THE UP CONFIRMS THE BELIEF OF SEVERAL LOCAL POLITICAL OBSERVERS, AND THE HYPOTHESES OF UNIVERSITY OF NATAL SOCIAL SCIENTIST LAWRENCE SCHLEMMER WHO CONDUCTED SEVERAL OPINION POLLS PRECEDING THE ELECTION, THAT THE UP'S SUPPORT IS BEING RAPWLY ERODED BY BOTH THE PRP AND THE NATIONALISTS. IN A REPORT PUBLISHED THREE DAYS BEFORE THE ELECTION, SCHLEMMER

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STATED HIS LATEST SURVEY INDICATED 25 PER CENT OF THE PRP'S

SUPPORTERS HAD PREVIOUSLY FAVORED THE UP, WHILE 17 PER CENT OF THE NATIONALISTS' SUPPORT ALSO CAME FROM THE UP. THE UP GAINED ONLY THREE PER CENT FROM THE NATIONALISTS AND ONE PER CENT FROM THE PRP.

3. THE LONG, FOUR MONTH ELECTION CAMPAIGN WAS PRIMARILY A CONTEST BETWEEN THE NATIONALISTS AND PRP IN WHICH THE PRINCIPAL ISSUE WAS NATIONAL SECURITY. THEIR PUBLIC DEBATE BASICALLY ADDRESSED THE QUESTION OF WHETHER SOUTH AFRICA'S SECURITY PROBLEM LAY WITHIN THE COUNTRY ITSELF OR OUTSIDE ITS BORDERS; WORRALL, CLAIMING THE LATTER, URGED SUPPORT FOR PRIME MINISTER VORSTER'S DUAL POLICY OF DETENTE AND MILITARY PREPAREDNESS, WHILE PITMAN, TAKING THE OPPOSITE VIEW, PRESCRIBED CHANGES AIMED AT AMELIORATING THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH SOUTH AFRICAN BLACKS LIVE. FOR ITS PART, THE UP WARNED OF THE DANGERS OF MOVING EITHER TOO FAR LEFT OR RIGHT AND CHANGING EITHER TOO QUICKLY OR TOO SLOWLY.

4. THE PRP VICTORY IN DURBAN NORTH, ITS FIRST IN NATAL, IS A CLEAR INDICATION TO THE HARD-PRESSED UP THAT THERE ARE NO MORE SAFE SEATS, EVEN IN THE UP'S HOME PROVINCE, AND THAT THEY CAN NO LONGER RELY ON THE HABITUAL SUPPORT OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING VOTERS. THE UP'S WEAKNESS IS THAT IT APPEARS TO VOTERS TO HAVE NEITHER THE POLICIES NOR LEADERSHIP--THE LATTER SOMETIMES EVEN ADMITTED BY LOCAL UP POLITICIANS--TO DEAL WITH SOUTH AFRICA'S TWO CLOSELY LINKED PROBLEMS, RACE AND NATIONAL SECURITY. UNDOUBTEDLY, THE DEFEAT IN DURBAN NORTH WILL PROVOKE CHANGES IN BOTH POLICIES AND LEADERSHIP--WITH THE LATTER LIKELY TO PRECEDE THE FORMER.

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